

Patricia Sulak: "Sex-Education Program May Get Adolescents to Delay Sex"

Reuters (07.20.06)

Texas researchers report that after participating in a two-week sex education program designed and implemented by an academic medical center, more middle school students said they would postpone having sex for the first time.

"Involvement by the medical profession can assure medically correct content, appropriate research outcomes, and enhanced quality of medical information in this important area of adolescent health," Dr. Patricia J. Sulak of the Texas A&M University System Health Science Center College of Medicine and colleagues noted in the report.

Temple school officials had approached health care professionals at the medical school to help develop a program for sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders that emphasized postponing sexual activity. The program focused on the consequences of teen sex and "skill building, character building, and refusal skills," Sulak and her team said. Students considering having sex were encouraged to meet with a health care professional.

A total of 26,125 students completed surveys before the program, while 24,500 filled out identical surveys afterwards. Across the three grades, students showed improved knowledge, on average, after the course.

The proportion of students who said they planned to delay sex until after high school climbed from 84 percent before the program to 87 percent after. The proportion who said they planned to delay sex until marriage rose from 60 percent before the program to 71 percent after.

Attending religious services and watching two hours or less of TV on school nights were other factors associated with planning to delay sex. Students whose parents were still married were also more likely to report delaying sex.

Participants who rated themselves "less than C" students were more likely to think teens should "have sex whenever they want," and they fared worse on knowledge tests after the program.

"By placing medical emphasis on risk avoidance and primary prevention of disease," the study authors concluded, "encouraging adolescents to delay sexual onset can lead to significant health benefits."

The full report, "Impact of an Adolescent Sex Education Program that Was Implemented by an Academic Medical Center," was published in the American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology (2006;195(1):78-84).